

Meeting Minutes

Natural Heritage Advisory Council

March 24, 2017

Minutes Approved: October 19, 2017

Natural Resources Building
1111 Washington Street SE
Olympia, WA 98504
Room 172

9:30 am – 4:00 PM

Members Present: Peter Dunwiddie, Heather Kapust, Norm Schaaf, Brock Milliern, and Sarah Gage. Members participating via phone: Cathy Baker (until noon break) and Rob Fimbel (joined prior to discussion of minutes).

Staff Present: John Gamon, Curt Pavola, Mark Reed, Joe Rocchio, Rebecca Niggeman and Jasa Holt.

1. **Welcome and Introductions:** The meeting was called to order by Chair Dunwiddie at 9:45 am. All present introduced themselves, including those on the phone and those present in-person.
2. **Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes of January 19, 2017, Meeting:** Schaaf moved approval of the minutes as drafted. Baker seconded. Voting members unanimously approved the minutes.
3. **Progress on Past Recommendations – Acquisitions Report:** Mark Reed presented the acquisition update (see attached report). During this reporting period, the Department purchased 2 properties totaling 10.44 acres and successfully spent \$440,000 on land value, using Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program grant funds and Navy Funds. One property was within Woodard Bay NRCA (5 acres) and the other was within Stavis NRCA (5+ acres).

Reed also asked for input from council members on the format and content of the acquisitions updates. Council members encouraged staff to include:

- full legends on maps
- use photographs to help convey the values and issues at sites
- provide more context regarding how individual acquisitions contribute to the full site design
- identify challenges and opportunities:
 - How long did the acquisition take?
 - What issues accompany the acquired properties?
 - Is restoration planned? What will it entail?

4. **Natural Heritage Advisory Council Vacancies:** Chair Dunwiddie informed the council of his meeting with the new Commissioner of Public Lands, Hillary Franz, which was in part to discuss council vacancies. Regarding vacancies, Gamon noted that we have not yet provided the full “Council/Program 101” to the new commissioner. Former NHAC member Dan Stonington, who is DNR's new policy director, was also in the meeting with the Commissioner along with Dunwiddie, Milliern, and Gamon. Commissioner Franz voiced her interest in having an educator on the council, in particular to connect with youth who may not currently have much interaction with nature. She also mentioned an interest in ensuring that we had reasonable geographic representation on the council.

Gamon reviewed the current vacancies: there are a total of 6 vacancies (although Janelle Downs is expected to be reappointed). So, the 5 remaining vacancies include 2 scientist positions, 2 citizens-at-large positions, and 1 agricultural landowner position.

Council members discussed potential candidates to fill the vacancies, in particular those involved in education. There was also discussion of the recruitment process and existing council members' role in recruitment.

Gamon indicated that he will create a brief summary of NHAC duties for current members to use in outreach for the vacant council positions. Gamon also reminded everyone that an earlier effort to fill vacancies had resulted in several willing candidates, none of whom were appointed by the previous Commissioner. Gamon indicated he would contact those individuals to gauge their current interest in being appointed. Strong interest was expressed in getting at least some of the vacancies filled in time for the June meeting. Given that goal, council members were encouraged to identify candidates within the next couple of weeks.

5. **Natural Heritage Plan:** In the meeting with the new commissioner mentioned in the previous agenda item, Commissioner Franz noted that the Natural Heritage Plan was written six years ago. She suggested that we consider addressing what has changed since that time, such as population growth and shifts, increase in land trust activities, climate change, etc.

Council members and staff discussed how to communicate the conservation need that is identified in the plan beyond the document itself. Milliarn suggested that the Commissioner would like DNR programs to be more understood, and for us to communicate more about our work. Council members mentioned that other state agencies, and programs within those agencies, have well-developed communications plans, successfully using social media as part of their communications strategy. There was also discussion of partnering with land trusts and school districts to make our natural areas more accessible, thereby increasing and improving our communication about the values of natural areas.

Schaaf suggested DNR set a goal in the upcoming Natural Heritage Plan to find and take advantage of such opportunities. Fimbel suggested going one step further to describe a trail in the plan to complete as an example, even if it involved only one site.

Regarding timing for the new version of the plan, Gamon stated that it needs to be made available to the Legislature in early 2018, which also fits with Recreation and Conservation Office grant eligibility requirements.

Milliarn suggested, considering the 2-year Natural Heritage Plan cycle, of taking on a couple of new items during the current plan while cuing up additional topics for future plans. Gamon added that the joint council and Chelan-Douglas Land Trust meeting in June will inform the section of the plan concerning land trusts and partnerships. Dunwiddie agreed that the council would ideally sign off on the final plan during the October meeting; thus seeing draft sections as they are completed will be important.

6. **Preview and planning for June NHAC meeting:** Gamon provided an overview of the planned joint meeting with the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust at the June 2017 council meeting. Essentially the meeting is designed to explore potential collaborations with land trusts, touching on the following topics: understanding each other's priorities, sharing data and information, use of conservation assessment and planning tools, site-specific conservation planning, stewardship, education and public access.

Future outreach by Natural Heritage Program and Natural Areas Program staff could benefit from this type of joint meeting and collaboration. The Washington Association of Land Trusts will also be invited to have a representative attend the meeting. The council discussion identified questions/topics of interest for the June meeting:

- Capturing information about what is conserved on land trust ownership

- Learning more about land trust funding and how grant funded projects might fit into that mix
- How do local communities shape the activities of a land trust? Conservation values? Recreation values? Economic values?
- What do land trusts know about Natural Heritage information? Do they use it?
- The differences between how a state agency and a local land trust are perceived in local communities.
- Recognition that land trusts and DNR have different objectives, although there may be overlap.

7. Agency Reports

Recreation and Conservation Office: Written report attached.

Department of Ecology: Kapust reported that interest in the grants available through the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation program has increased in Washington, with DOE receiving double the number of proposals they usually see.

State Parks and Recreation Commission: Written report attached.

Department of Fish and Wildlife: Gamon noted Cynthia Wilkerson has taken a different position within WDFW, and will no longer be DFW's representative on the NHAC.

Department of Natural Resources: Gamon and Pavola shared information on new staff in the Commissioner of Public Lands' office, including former Natural Heritage Advisory Council member Dan Stonington, who is the agency's policy director. A newly signed "good neighbor agreement" with the USFS was described.

- 8. Natural Areas Program Report:** Pavola distributed a written program report (see attachment) that reviewed operating budget and grant projects currently under consideration by the Legislature.
- 9. Natural Heritage Program Report:** See attachment.
- 10. Other Business:** No other business was identified.